



**One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

March 29, 2019

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

We write to express our serious concerns regarding the \$1 billion reprogrammed from military personnel funding for the Drug Interdictions and Counter-Narcotics Activities account to build 57 miles of pedestrian fencing along the Southwest border. We object to this transfer as it does not address the real needs of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in the El Paso Sector, will negatively impact the morale and readiness of our service members, and was not considered or approved by Congress.

In your February 25, 2019 request to the U.S. Department of Defense, you called for 46 miles of 18-foot-high pedestrian fencing in the Doña Ana and Luna counties of southern New Mexico. Given the Administration's decision to shut down the government over border wall funding and its subsequent declaration of a national state of emergency, we are troubled by your decision to prioritize the construction of border barriers in this remote and rural section of the Southwest border. This stretch of the border is already protected by dozens of miles of vehicle barriers and is not a high-traffic area, relative to other sections of the Southwest border.

Instead of investing millions on 18-foot-high fences in rural and isolated areas, we ask you to use these funds to remedy the high attrition rates of Border Patrol, and to enhance detection and surveillance technology to improve our agents' situational awareness in rural and hard-to-reach areas. These funds would also be better used for deploying inspection technology at our ports of entry, where most illicit narcotics enter the country.

To help us understand why you chose to prioritize border barrier construction in the remote and low-traffic lands of the Doña Ana and Luna counties, we ask that you respond to the following questions by no later than April 12, 2019.

In the aforementioned 46-mile border stretch in southern New Mexico:

- How many miles of vehicle barriers are there?
- How many migrants were apprehended between the ports since 2016? Of those, how many presented themselves to an agent? How many were family units?
- What is the value, in U.S. dollars, of illicit narcotics CBP has interdicted at and between the ports of entry since 2016?
- How many total agents and officers, including new hires and reassignments, have been assigned since 2016?

Additionally:

- Prior to your decision to construct pedestrian fencing, did you review alternatives, such as technology, to determine the most efficient method to detect individuals crossing the border? If so, please provide documentation of the alternatives analysis.
- Prior to your decision to construct pedestrian fencing, did you analyze which areas along the southern border to prioritize for construction? If so, please provide full documentation of the report.

We appreciate your attention into this important matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security



XOCHITL TORRES SMALL
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Oversight, Management, and
Accountability

Cc: Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick M. Shanahan